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REASONS

FOR

CONTENTMENT;

ADDRESSED TO THE

LABOURING PART

OF THE

British Public.

BY WILLIAM PALEY, M.A.
ARCHDEACON OF CARLISLE.

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REASONS

FOR

CONTENTMENT, &c.

HUMAN life has been ſaid to reſemble the ſituation of ſpectators in a theatre, where, whilſt each perſon is engaged by the ſcene which paſſes before him, no one thinks about the place in which he is ſeated. It is only when the buſineſs is interrupted, or when the ſpectator's attention to it grows idle and remiſs, that he begins to conſider at all, who is before him or who is behind him, whether others are better accommodated than himſelf, or whether many be not much worſe. It is thus with the various ranks and ſtations of ſociety. So long as a man is intent upon the duties and concerns of his own condition, he never

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never thinks of comparing it with any other; he is never troubled with reflections upon the different claſſes and orders of mankind, the advantages and diſadvantages of each, the neceſſity or non-neceſſity of civil diſtinctions, much leſs does he feel within himſelf a diſpoſition to covet or envy any of them. He is too much taken up with the occupations of his calling, its purſuits, cares, and buſineſs, to beſtow unprofitable meditations upon the circumſtances in which he ſees others placed. And by this means a man of a ſound and active mind has, in his very conſtitution, a remedy againſt the diſturbance of envy and diſcontent. Theſe paſſions gain no admittance into his breaſt, becauſe there is no leiſure there or vacancy for the traits of thought which generate them. He enjoys therefore eaſe in this reſpect, and eaſe reſulting from the beſt cauſe, the power of keeping his imagination at home; of confining it to what belongs to himſelf, inſtead of ſending it forth to wander amongſt ſpeculations which have neither limits nor uſe, amidſt views of unattainable grandeur, fancied happineſs, of extolled, becauſe unexperienced, privileges and delights.

The wiſeſt advice that can be given is, never to allow our attention to dwell upon compariſons between

between our own condition and that of others, but to keep it fixed upon the duties and concerns of the condition itſelf. But ſince every man has not this power; ſince the minds of ſome men will be buſy in contemplating the advantages which they ſee others poſſeſs, and ſince perſons in laborious ſtations of life are wont to view the higher ranks of ſociety, with ſentiments which not only tend to make themſelves unhappy, but which are very different from the truth, it may be an uſeful office to point out to them ſome of theſe conſiderations, which, if they *will* turn their thoughts to the ſubject, they ſhould endeavour to take fairly into the account.

And firſt, we are moſt of us apt to murmur when we ſee exorbitant fortunes placed in the hands of ſingle perſons; larger, we are ſure, than they can want, or, as we think, than they can uſe. This is ſo common a reflection, that I will not ſay it is not natural. But whenever the complaint comes into our minds, we ought to recollect, that the thing happens in conſequence of thoſe very rules and laws which ſecure to ourſelves our property, be it ever ſo ſmall. The laws which accidentally caſt enormous eſtates into one great man's poſſeſſion,

poſſeſſion, are, after all, the ſelf-ſame laws which protect and guard the poor man. Fixed rules of property are eſtabliſhed, for one as well as another, without knowing, before-hand, whom they may affect. If theſe rules ſometimes throw an exceſſive or diſproportionate ſhare to one man's lot, who can help it? It is much better that it ſhould be ſo, than that the rules themſelves ſhould be broken up: and you can only have one ſide of the alternative or the other. To aboliſh riches, would not be to aboliſh poverty; but, on the contrary, to leave it without protection or reſource. It is not for the poor man to repine at the effects of laws and rules, by which he himſelf is benefited every hour of his exiſtence; which ſecure to him his earnings, his habitation, his bread, his life; without which he, no more than the rich man, could either eat his meal in quietneſs, or go to bed in ſafety. Of the two, it is rather more the concern of the poor to ſtand up for the laws, than of the rich; for it is the law which defends the weak againſt the ſtrong, the humble againſt the powerful, the little againſt the great; and weak and ſtrong, humble and powerful, little and great there would be, even were there no laws whatever. Beſide, what after all is the miſchief? The owner of

a great

a great eſtate does not eat or drink more than the owner of a ſmall one. His fields do not produce worſe crops, nor does the produce maintain fewer mouths. If eſtates were more equally divided, would greater numbers be fed, or clothed, or employed? Either, therefore, large fortunes are not a public evil, or, if they be in any degree an evil, it is to be borne with, for the ſake of thoſe fixed and general rules concerning property, in the preſervation and ſteadineſs of which all are intereſted.

Fortunes however of any kind, from the nature of the thing, can only fall to the lot of a few. I ſay, "from the nature of the thing." The very utmoſt that can be done by laws and government, is to enable every man, who hath health, to procure a healthy ſubſiſtence for himſelf and a family. Where this is the caſe, things are at their perfection. They have reached their limit. Were the princes and nobility, the legiſlators and counſellors of the land, all of them the beſt and wiſeſt men that ever lived, their united virtue and wiſdom could do no more than this. They, if any ſuch there be, who would teach you to expect more, give you no inſtance where more has ever been attained.

But

But Providence, which foreſaw, which appointed, indeed, the neceſſity to which human affairs are ſubjected (and againſt which it were impious to complain), hath contrived that, whilſt fortunes are only for a few, the reſt of mankind may be happy without them. And this leads me to conſider the comparative advantages and comforts which belong to the condition of thoſe, who ſubſiſt, as the great maſs of every people do and muſt ſubſiſt, by perſonal labour, and the ſolid reaſons they have for contentment in their ſtations. I do not now uſe the terms poor and rich, becauſe that man is to be accounted poor, of whatever rank he be, and ſuffers the pains of poverty, whoſe expences exceed his reſources; and no man is, properly ſpeaking, poor but he. But I at preſent conſider the advantages of thoſe laborious conditions of life, which compoſe the great portion of every human community.

And, firſt, it is an ineſtimable bleſſing of ſuch ſituations, that they ſupply a conſtant train of employment both to body and mind. A huſbandman, or a manufacturer, or a tradeſman, never goes to bed at night without having his buſineſs to riſe up to in the morning. He would underſtand the

the value of this advantage, did he know that the want of it compoſes one of the greateſt plagues of the human ſoul; a plague by which the rich, eſpecially thoſe who inherit riches, are exceedingly oppreſſed. Indeed it is to get rid of it, that is to ſay, it is to have ſomething to do, that they are driven upon thoſe ſtrange and unaccountable ways of paſſing their time, in which we ſometimes ſee them, to our ſurpriſe, engaged.—A poor man's condition ſupplies him with that, which no man can do without, and which a rich man, with all his opportunities and all his contrivance, can hardly ſupply himſelf, regular engagement, buſineſs to look forward to, ſomething to be done for every day, ſome employment prepared for every morning. A few of better judgement can ſeek out for themſelves conſtant and uſeful occupation. There is not one of you takes the pains in his calling, which ſome of the moſt independent men in the nation have taken, and are taking, to promote what they deem to be a point of great concern to the intereſts of humanity, by which neither they nor theirs can ever gain a ſhilling, and in which, ſhould they ſucceed, thoſe who are to be benefited by their ſervice, will never know nor thank them for it. I only mention this to ſhow, in conjunc-

tion with what has been obſerved above, that of thoſe who are at liberty to act as they pleaſe, the wiſe prove, and the fooliſh confeſs, by their conduct, that a life of employment is the only life worth leading; and that the chief difference between their manner of paſſing their time and yours, is, that they can chooſe the objects of their activity, which you cannot. This privilege may be an advantage to ſome, but for nine out of ten it is fortunate, that occupation is provided to their hands, that they have it not to ſeek, that it is impoſed upon them by their neceſſities and occaſions; for the conſequence of liberty in this reſpect would be, that, loſt in the perplexity of chooſing, they would ſink into irrecoverable indolence, inaction, and unconcern; into that vacancy and tireſomeneſs of time and thought, which are inſeparable from ſuch a ſituation. A man's thoughts muſt be going. Whilſt he is awake, the working of his mind is as conſtant as the beating of his pulſe. He can no more ſtop the one than the other. Hence if our thoughts have nothing to act upon, they act upon ourſelves. They acquire a corroſive quality. They become in the laſt degree irkſome and tormenting. Wherefore that ſort of equitable engagement, which takes up the

the thoughts ſufficiently, yet ſo as to leave them capable of turning to any thing more important, as occaſions offer or require, is a moſt invaluable bleſſing. And if the induſtrious be not ſenſible of the bleſſing, it is for no other reaſon than becauſe they have never experienced, or rather ſuffered, the want of it.

Again; ſome of the neceſſities which poverty (if the condition of the labouring part of mankind muſt be ſo called) impoſes, are not hardſhips but pleaſures. Frugality itſelf is a pleaſure. It is an exerciſe of attention and contrivance, which, whenever it is ſucceſsful, produces ſatisfaction. The very care and forecaſt that are neceſſary to keep expences and earnings upon a level form, when not embarraſſed by too great difficulties, an agreeable engagement of the thoughts. This is loſt amidſt abundance. There is no pleaſure in taking out of a large unmeaſured fund. They who do that, and only that, are the mere conveyors of money from one hand to another.

A yet more ſerious advantage which perſons in inferior ſtations poſſeſs, is the eaſe with which they provide for their children. All the proviſion

which a poor man's child requires is contained in two words, "induſtry and innocence." With theſe qualities, tho' without a ſhilling to ſet him forwards, he goes into the world prepared to become an uſeful, virtuous, and happy man. Nor will he fail to meet with a maintenance adequate to the habits with which he has been brought up, and to the expectations which he has formed; a degree of ſucceſs ſufficient for a perſon of any condition whatever. Theſe qualities of induſtry and innocence, which, I repeat again, are all that are abſolutely neceſſary, every parent can give to his children without expence, becauſe he can give them by his own authority and example; and they are to be communicated, I believe, and preſerved in no other way. I call this a ſerious advantage of humble ſtations, becauſe, in what we reckon ſuperior ranks of life, there is a real difficulty in placing children in ſituations, which may in any degree ſupport them in the claſs and in the habits in which they have been brought up with their parents: from which great and oftentimes diſtreſſing perplexity the poor are free. With health of body, innocency of mind, and habits of induſtry, a poor man's child has nothing to be afraid

afraid of; nor his father or mother any thing to be afraid of for him.

The labour of the world is carried on by *ſervice*, that is, by one man working under another mans direction. I take it for granted, that this is the beſt way of conducting buſineſs, becauſe all nations and ages have adopted it. Conſequently ſervice is the relation which, of all others, affects the greateſt number of individuals, and in the moſt ſenſible manner. In whatever country therefore this relation is well and equitably regulated, in that country the poor will be happy. Now how is the matter managed with us? Except apprenticeſhips, the neceſſity of which, every one, at leaſt every father and mother, will acknowledge, as the beſt, if not the only practicable, way of gaining inſtruction and ſkill, and which have their foundation in *nature*, becauſe they have their foundation in the *natural* ignorance and imbecillity of youth: except theſe, ſervice in England is, as it ought to be, voluntary and by contract, a fair exchange of work for wages; an equal bargain, in which each party has his rights and his redreſs; wherein every ſervant chuſes his maſter. Can this be mended? I will add, that a continuance

nuance of this connection is frequently the foundation of ſo much mutual kindneſs and attachment, that very few friendſhips are more cordial, or more ſincere; that it leaves oftentimes nothing in ſervitude, except the name; nor any diſtinction, but what one party is as much pleaſed with, and ſometimes alſo, as proud of, as the other:

What then (for this is the fair way of calculating) is there in higher ſtations to place againſt theſe advantages? What does the poor man ſee in the life or condition of the rich that ſhould render him diſſatisfied with his own?

Was there as much in ſenſual pleaſures, I mean in the luxuries of eating and drinking, and other gratifications of that ſort, as ſome men's imaginations would repreſent there to be, but which no man's experience finds in them, I contend, that, even in theſe reſpects, the advantage is on the ſide of the poor. The rich who addict themſelves to indulgence loſe their reliſh. Their deſires are dead. Their ſenſibilities are worn and tired. Hence they lead a languid, ſatiated exiſtence. Hardly any thing can amuſe, or rouſe, or gratify them. Whereas the poor man, if ſomething extraordinary

traordinary fall in his way, comes to the repaſt with appetite; is pleaſed and refreſhed; derives from his uſual courſe of moderation and temperance a quickneſs of perception and delight, which the unreſtrained voluptuary knows nothing of. Habits of all kinds are much the ſame. Whatever is habitual becomes ſmooth, and indifferent, and nothing more. The luxurious receive no greater pleaſures from their dainties, than the peaſant does from his homely fair. But here is the difference. The peaſant, whenever he goes abroad, finds a feaſt, whereas the epicure muſt be ſumptuouſly entertained to eſcape diſguſt. They who ſpend every day in diverſions, and they who go every day about their uſual buſineſs, paſs their time much alike. Attending to what they are about, wanting nothing, regretting nothing, they are both, whilſt engaged, in a ſtate of eaſe; but then whatever ſuſpends the purſuits of the man of diverſion diſtreſſes him, whereas to the labourer or the man of buſineſs every pauſe is a recreation. And this is a vaſt advantage which they poſſeſs who are trained and inured to a life of occupation, above the man who ſets up for a life of pleaſure. Variety is ſoon exhauſted. Novelty itſelf is no longer new. Amuſements are become too familiar

liar to delight, and he is in a ſituation in which he can never change but for the worſe.

Another article, which the poor are apt to envy in the rich, is their *eaſe*. Now here they miſtake the matter totally. They call inaction eaſe, whereas nothing is farther from it. Reſt is eaſe. That is true. But no man can reſt who has not worked. Reſt is the ceſſation of labour. It cannot therefore be enjoyed, or even taſted, except by thoſe who have known fatigue. The rich ſee, and not without envy, the refreſhment and pleaſure which reſt affords to the poor, and chuſe to wonder that they cannot find the ſame enjoyment in being free from the neceſſity of working at all. They do not obſerve that this enjoyment muſt be purchaſed by previous labour, and that he who will not pay the price, cannot have the gratification. Being without work is one thing; repoſing from work is another. The one is as tireſome and inſipid, as the other is ſweet and ſoothing. The one in general is the fate of the rich man, the other is the fortune of the poor. I have heard it ſaid that if the face of happineſs can any where be ſeen, it is in the ſummer evening of a country village. Where, after the labours of the day, each man at his door, with

with his children, amongſt his neighbours, feels his frame and his heart at reſt, every thing about him pleaſed and pleaſing, and a delight and complacency in his ſenſations far beyond what either luxury or diverſion can afford. The rich want this; and they want what they muſt never have.

As to ſome other things which the poor are diſpoſed to envy in the condition of the rich, ſuch as their ſtate, their appearance, the grandeur of their houſes, dreſs, equipage, and attendance, they only envy the rich theſe things, becauſe they do not know the rich. They have not opportunities of obſerving with what neglect and inſenſibility the rich poſſeſs and regard theſe things themſelves. If they could ſee the great man in his retirement, and in his actual manner of life, they would find him, if pleaſed at all, taking pleaſure in ſome of thoſe ſimple enjoyments which they can command as well as he. They would find him amongſt his children, in his huſbandry, in his garden, purſuing ſome rural diverſion, or occupied with ſome trifling exerciſe, which are all gratifications, as much within the power and reach of the poor man, as of the rich; or rather more ſo.

To learn the art of contentment, is only to learn what happineſs actually conſiſts in. Senſual pleaſures add little to its ſubſtance. Eaſe, if by that be meant exemption from labour, contributes nothing. One, however, conſtant ſpring of ſatisfaction, and almoſt infallible ſupport of chearfulneſs and ſpirits, is the exerciſe of domeſtic affections; the preſence of objects of tenderneſs and endearment in our families, our kindred, our friends. Now have the poor anything to complain of here? Are they not ſurrounded by their relatives as generally as others. The poor man has his wife and children about him; and what has the rich man more? He has the ſame enjoyment of their ſociety, the ſame ſolicitude for their welfare, the ſame pleaſure in their good qualities, improvement and ſucceſs: their connection with him is as ſtrict and intimate, their attachment as ſtrong, their gratitude as warm. I have no propenſity to envy any one, leaſt of all the rich and great; but if I were diſpoſed to this weakneſs, the ſubject of my envy would be, a healthy young man, in full poſſeſſion of his ſtrength and faculties, going forth in a morning to work for his wife and children, or bringing them home his wages at night.

But was difference of rank or fortune of more importance to perſonal happineſs than it is, it would be ill purchaſed by any ſudden or violent change of condition. An alteration of circumſtances, which breaks up a man's habits of life, deprives him of his occupation, removes him from his acquaintance, may be called an elevation of fortune, but hardly ever brings with it an addition of enjoyment. They to whom accidents of this ſort have happened never found them to anſwer their expectations. After the firſt hurry of the change is over, they are ſurpriſed to feel in themſelves, liſtleſſneſs and dejection, a conſciouſneſs of ſolitude, vacancy and reſtraint, in the place of chearfulneſs, liberty, and eaſe. They try to make up for what they have loſt, ſometimes by a beaſtly ſottiſhneſs, ſometimes by a fooliſh diſſipation, ſometimes by a ſtupid ſloth; all which effects are only ſo many confeſſions, that changes of this ſort were not made for man. If any public diſturbance ſhould produce not an equality, (for that is not the proper name to give it) but a jumble of ranks and profeſſions amongſt us, it is not only evident what the rich would loſe, but there is alſo this further misfortune, that what the rich loſt the poor would not gain. I (God knows) could

not get my livelihood by labour, nor would the labourer find any ſolace or enjoyment in my ſtudies. If we were to exchange conditions to-morrow, all the effect would be, that we both ſhould be more miſerable, and the work of both be worſe done. Without debating therefore, what might be very difficulty to decide, which of our two conditions was better to begin with, one point is certain, that it is beſt for each to remain in his own. The change, and the only change, to be deſired, is that gradual and progreſſive improvement of our circumſtances, which is the natural fruit of ſucceſsful induſtry; when each year is ſomething better than the laſt; when we are enabled to add to our little houſehold one article after another of new comfort or conveniency, as our profits increaſe, or our burthen becomes leſs; and, what is beſt of all, when we can afford, as our ſtrength declines, to relax our labours, or divide our cares. This may be looked forward to, and is practicable, by great numbers, in a ſtate of public order and quiet, it is abſolutely impoſſible in any other.

If in comparing the different conditions of ſocial life we bring religion into the account, the argument

ment is ſtill eaſier. Religion ſmooths all inequalities, becauſe it unfolds a proſpect which makes all earthly diſtinctions nothing. And I do allow that there are many caſes of ſickneſs, affliction, and diſtreſs, which Chriſtianity alone can comfort. But in eſtimating the mere diverſities of ſtation and civil condition, I have not thought it neceſſary to introduce religion into the enquiry at all, becauſe I contend, that the man who murmurs and repines, when he has nothing to murmur and repine about, but the mere want of independent property, is not only irreligious, but unreaſonable in his complaint; and that he would find, did he know the truth, and conſider his caſe fairly, that a life of labour, ſuch I mean as is led by the labouring part of mankind in this country, has advantages in it, which compenſate all its inconveniencies. When compared with the life of the rich, it is better in theſe important reſpects. It ſupplies employment, it promotes activity. It keeps the body in better health, the mind more engaged, and, of courſe, more quiet. It is more ſenſible of eaſe, more ſuſceptible of pleaſure. It is attended with greater alacrity of ſpirits, a more conſtant chearfulneſs and ſerenity of temper. It affords eaſier and more certain methods of ſending children

children into the world in ſituations ſuited to their habits and expectations. It is free from many heavy anxieties which rich men feel; it is fraught with many ſources of delight which they want.

If to theſe reaſons for contentment the reflecting huſbandman or artificer adds another very material one, that changes of condition, which are attended with a breaking up and ſacrifice of our ancient courſe and habit of living, never can be productive of happineſs, he will perceive; I truſt, that to covet the ſtations or fortunes of the rich, or ſo however to covet them, as to wiſh to ſeize them by force, or through the medium of public uproar and confuſion, is not only wickedneſs, but folly; as miſtaken in the end, as in the means; *that it is not only to venture out to ſea in a ſtorm, but to venture for nothing.*

FINIS.

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